

Husserl and externalism

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Abstract It is argued that Husserl was an “externalist” in at least one sense. For it is argued that Husserl held that genuinely perceptual experiences—that is to say, experiences that are of some real object in the world—differ intrinsically, essentially and as a kind from any hallucinatory experiences. There is, therefore, no neutral “content” that such perceptual experiences share with hallucinations, differing from them only over whether some additional non-psychological condition holds or not. In short, it is argued that Husserl was a “disjunctivist”. In addition, it is argued that Husserl held that the individual object of any experience, perceptual or hallucinatory, is essential to and partly constitutive of that experience. The argument focuses on three aspects of Husserl’s thought: his account of intentional objects, his notion of *horizon*, and his account of *reality*.

Keywords Husserl · Externalism · Disjunctivism · Reality · Horizon · Intentionality

In this paper I raise a question that many, I fear, will regard as silly. The question is: Could Husserl have been an externalist? This question may strike many as a silly one to ask, because the answer, it may be thought, is obvious: Of course he couldn’t. Externalism stands opposed to an erstwhile dominant ‘internalist’ view in philosophy that is broadly ‘Cartesian’ in spirit; and Husserl is commonly seen as fully subscribing to central Cartesian tenets. One leading externalist, Tyler Burge, on two occasions lumps Husserl in with the tradition that he himself is intent upon overthrowing. According to Burge, internalism (or ‘individualism’, as he calls it), derives from Descartes and “has re-emerged in the writings of Husserl” (Burge, 1986a, p. 117). It has, he says elsewhere, “recently found a home in the phenomenological tradition” (Burge, 1986b,

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p. 4)¹. I shall argue that the matter is not as straightforward as Burge and many others suppose. I shall not be arguing that Husserl was without doubt an externalist. No definitive statement on this issue can, I believe, reasonably be given—if only because Husserl himself never actually formulates the issue itself. I shall, however, argue for three claims. First, it seems likely that Husserl was an externalist, in that he says things that commit him to that position. Secondly, and more weakly, it is at least not the case that Husserl definitely was not an externalist. Thirdly, and even more weakly, there is nothing in transcendental phenomenology as such—i.e., in its core commitments—that is incompatible with externalism. Even if, contrary to what I believe, the particular form of transcendental phenomenology that I shall be investigating in this paper is not one that Husserl himself would have subscribed to, it is a possible form that transcendental phenomenology can take. And this particular form is, I shall argue, fully compatible with—indeed, it entails—a form of externalism. Although the weakest of my claims, the last is perhaps the most significant, since it is not a historical claim about Husserl, but a philosophical claim.

I

The sort of externalism I am concerned with in this paper is what is sometimes termed ‘content externalism’ (as opposed to a type of externalism discussed in connection with analyses of knowledge). John McDowell captures the central tenet of such externalism as follows: “Which configurations a mind can get itself into is partly determined by which objects exist in the world” (McDowell, 1986, p. 139). And there seem to be five distinct forms of such externalism on the market at the present time. The first we might term *social externalism*—a position chiefly associated with the writings of Tyler Burge, and which is roughly the claim that what one can think about is determined by the linguistic community one is in.² The second we might term *natural kinds externalism*, which is the idea that the object of thoughts directed to natural kinds of thing is determined by the ‘real essence’ of such kinds—something that may be unknown to the thinkers in question.³ The third is Tyler Burge’s *perceptual externalism*, which is the claim that the type of object represented by a type of perceptual experience is the type of object that is the normal cause of such a type of experience (see Burge, 1986b). The fourth is *disjunctivism*, which holds that the experience involved in any perception of a physical object is different in kind, even *qua* experience, from any experience that is not (or is not an element in) a perception of a physical object: in other words, it is different in kind from any possible hallucinatory experience.⁴ Finally, there is what we might call *de re externalism*, which is the idea that certain thoughts and perceptual experiences are *essentially* about particular objects in the world, and

¹ I should perhaps say that more recently Burge has retracted, or at least significantly modified, this charge as directed at Descartes. See, for example, Burge (2003). No such modification of the charge as directed against Husserl has, however, been forthcoming.

² See, for example, Burge (1979). Burge’s position in this paper is based in part upon the thought of Hilary Putnam. See, for example, Putnam (1975).

³ Burge has also endorsed this form of externalism. See, for example, Burge (1982). Burge’s thoughts in this area are perhaps even more directly dependent on the ideas of Putnam. See also, McGinn (1977).

⁴ Particularly influential disjunctivist texts are Hinton (1973), Snowdon (1980) and McDowell (1982).

so could not be had if those particular objects had not existed.⁵ A full investigation of the question whether Husserl was an externalist or not would raise this question in relation to each of the above forms of externalism. That, however, is beyond the scope of the present paper.⁶ I shall, therefore, restrict myself to claiming that Husserl subscribed to the *last two* forms of externalism. I should, therefore, say a little more about what I take these two positions to involve.

The central idea of disjunctivism is best conveyed through a consideration of some perceptual experience in which some real object in the physical world is perceived and a possible hallucination that perfectly matches it. In regard to such a pair of experiences, disjunctivism is essentially a negative thesis. It denies that these two experiences, indistinguishable to the subject though they may be, are, even *qua* experiences, of the same fundamental kind. The kind of experience that one has when one perceives a real object is simply unavailable when some such real physical object is not being perceived. In other words, according to disjunctivism, a perception of some object in the world does *not* differ from a hallucination simply in virtue of certain (presumably causal) *extra-mental* relations that it, unlike the hallucination, bears to the environment. Rather, the two experiences *as experiences* differ essentially in kind. This is a form of externalism, since it holds that a certain type of ‘mental state’—namely, perceptual experience—is simply not to be had in the absence of, because it is constitutively dependent upon, some item in the ‘external’ world.

Disjunctivism is frequently held together with the other claim that I ascribe to Husserl: that the very identity of a perceptual experience depends upon the identity of the object perceived. The two positions are, however, independent of one another. For a disjunctivist could hold that two qualitatively identical perceptual experiences of two qualitatively identical but numerically distinct real objects fall under the same fundamental experiential kind; and even that a certain perceptual experience *could have been* the perception of a numerically different, though qualitatively identical, object. Disjunctivism would be retained if it were yet claimed that all such perceptual experiences are essentially and intrinsically different in kind from any hallucination in virtue of being perceptions of *some* real object. One could also reject the converse inference—if, for example, one thought that the claim that perceptions’ objects are essential to them did not support a classification of experiences into distinct fundamental *kinds*. Indeed, one might question whether the second thesis that I am ascribing to Husserl deserves to be regarded as a form of externalism at all—especially as a form of ‘*content* externalism’. For someone might hold both that causes are essential to their effects, and also that a perceptual experience that is of some real object in the world is caused, in part, by that object. The combination of these two views hardly seems to amount to a form of externalism. In particular, the *content* of such a perceptual experience is irrelevant to the essentialist claim in question—as is, indeed, the fact that it is a psychological state at all. The claim is derived from a wholly general view about how anything whatever stands to its causes. The view I shall be attributing to Husserl is, however, stronger than the essentialist claim just discussed. It is, more precisely, the claim that the particular object of a perceptual experience is essential to that experience *in virtue of that experience’s content*. Such a view, does, it seems to me,

⁵ The chief source for this form externalism is Evans (1982) and McDowell (1984, 1986).

⁶ For what it is worth, perhaps I may say that, of the other forms of externalism, it is only Burge’s perceptual externalism that Husserl would certainly have rejected. For such a position is indeed, it seems to me, opposed in principle to transcendental phenomenology.

deserve to be regarded as externalist. In fact, even if this were denied, the essentialist claim in question is relevant to the issue of Husserl and externalism because, I shall be arguing, Husserl's acceptance of disjunctivism—which certainly is an externalist position—is inextricably linked to his acceptance of this essentialist claim.

II

There are three reasons why it may be thought that Husserl was clearly not an externalist in either of the above two ways. The first reason is a very bad one; but I briefly mention it because it does, sadly, have a certain currency in some parts of the philosophical community. For it is sometimes suggested that what phenomenology is exclusively concerned with is 'phenomenological content', and that this is to be understood as meaning *qualitative content*—something that is determinable simply on the basis of reflection on, or introspection of, experiences having such content. Such content, it is suggested, is fixed simply by 'what it is like' to have such experiences. Now, if this is what 'phenomenological content' means, then any philosopher who is restricted to discussing mental states in terms of such content will clearly not be able to regard perceptual experiences and matching hallucinations as different in kind, since they are, *ex hypothesi*, qualitatively identical in virtue of being indiscriminable to the subject. Moreover, since such content is specified merely qualitatively, it can have no essential dependence on any *individual* object in the world. As Martin Davies puts it, "If perceptual content is phenomenological content then, it seems, it is not object-involving" (Davies, 1992, p. 26).

In fact, however, the suggestion that phenomenology, or even Husserlian transcendental phenomenology in particular, is restricted to investigating phenomenological content in *this* sense is quite misguided. Phenomenological content, if we want to use this term, far outstrips merely qualitatively content as far as Husserl is concerned. In particular, there is, for him, in any world-directed state of mind, an important dimension of *implicit intentionality*, the most important aspect of which, as far as our present investigation is concerned, is *horizontal* intentionality. Indeed, according to Husserl, "All mistaken interpretations of being arise from a naïve blindness to the being-sense of co-determining horizons and to the corresponding tasks of uncovering implicit intentionality" (Husserl, 1973a, p. 118).⁷ An appreciation of the dimension of implicit intentionality will be an important element in the argument to be developed here.

There are, however, two more initially plausible reasons why Husserl could not have been an externalist. First, there is the fact that Husserl was an out and out Idealist.⁸ If this is not borne in mind, it is easy (too easy) to find passages in Husserl that may seem to indicate adherence to externalism. For example: "The perceived object does not somehow enter into relation to the perceptual appearances from outside" (Husserl, 1968, p. 178). Husserl can assert such a thing, however, because for

⁷ Translations are my own. All references to Husserl's published works are to the standard German editions. Where these contain the paginations of the original editions in the margin, my references are, except for (Husserl, 1969), to the latter. With only three exceptions such pagination is found in the margins of the available English translations. Where these three exceptions are concerned, I refer to section number rather than page number.

⁸ This claim is not, of course, uncontested. I shall, however, simply assume its truth here, since I have argued the matter at some length elsewhere. See Smith (2003, Chap. 4).

him there just is nothing ‘external’ to or ‘outside’ consciousness. Any such idea is, as he often puts it, a *nonsens*. Here is just one passage that expresses this view: “Consciousness, considered in its ‘purity’, has to be counted as a *self-contained context of being*, as a context of *absolute being*, into which nothing can penetrate and out of which nothing can slip; it has nothing spatio-temporally outside it, and it can be within no spatio-temporal context” (Husserl, 1977, p. 93). So, if Husserl is to be regarded as an externalist, clearly externalism must be understood somewhat differently from the way it usually is—since it is usually understood in the context of physical realism. It is not, however, difficult so to re-construe the position. All that we need to do is to construe externalism as dealing with what is external to any *individual* consciousness. Even if, ultimately, according to Husserl, consciousness exhausts the whole of reality, *my* consciousness is not thus ontologically exhaustive, and nor is yours. Although the physical world may ultimately “reduce” to consciousness (B II 2, 12),⁹ your consciousness cannot be reduced to mine, or mine to yours. Each individual consciousness, therefore, is ‘external’ to every other. Your consciousness is, as Husserl puts it, ‘alien’ (*fremd*) to my consciousness. Moreover, everything, the constitution of which involves other consciousnesses, will also count as external to any given consciousness. In particular, real, objective elements of the physical world count as external to any individual consciousness, because they have an essentially *inter*-subjective constitution. They are, according to Husserl, “genuinely transcendent” (Husserl, 1973b, p. 442) in relation to any individual consciousness—in contrast to anything that can be constituted within a ‘sphere of ownness’, which has but an ‘immanent transcendency’ (Husserl, 1973a, p. 136).¹⁰

The third initial ground for doubt that Husserl could possibly have been an externalist concerns his employment of the *epoché*. Phenomenological investigation is to proceed without any reliance on the belief that there is a real world. But is not such a procedure but an implementation of ‘methodological solipsism’? And is this not an essentially internalist, ‘Cartesian’ position? Now, Husserl’s employment of the *epoché* can be understood in two ways: as claiming that, given consciousness, the non-existence of the world is a *metaphysical possibility*, or that it is an *epistemic possibility*. As to the first claim, Husserl indeed does say, repeatedly, that there could (indeed, would) be consciousness even if no real world existed. “The being of consciousness,” he writes, “is in principle uncancellable. It is necessary being. The being of the world is contingent” (Husserl, 2003, p. 111). And again: “*No spatio-temporal [reales] being . . . is necessary for the being of consciousness itself* (in the widest sense of the stream of consciousness). *Immanent being is therefore without doubt absolute being, in the sense that in principle nulla ‘re’ indiget ad existendum*” (Husserl, 1977, p. 92). In such passages, and they could be multiplied, is not Husserl quite explicitly saying that every state of consciousness is ontologically independent of anything actually existing in the world? In fact, he is not, since such statements are ambiguous. If they are taken as saying that any actual conscious state, even one that is a perceptual experience of a real physical object, could exist in the absence of a real world, then they are certainly incompatible with externalism. But this is not the only way to take them; and it is not, I believe, the correct way. For Husserl could be saying, and I believe that he

⁹ References such as this are to Husserl’s unpublished manuscripts. I am grateful to the Husserl Archives in Leuven, and their director Prof. Rudolf Bernet, for permission to consult Husserl’s unpublished writings, and to quote from them.

¹⁰ In relation to *intersubjective* consciousness, however, such objective elements of the world once again emerge as having but an ‘immanent transcendency’ (e.g., Husserl, 1973a, pp. 137–138).

is saying, simply that *some form* of consciousness could exist even if there were no real world.¹¹ To accept this is not to accept the possibility that experiences that are actually of a real world could *themselves* exist in the absence of such a world; nor that experiences of the same fundamental *kind* as these perceptual experiences could exist in such a world-less situation. Husserl is often presented as holding the view that the existence or non-existence of the world *makes no difference* to consciousness—in the sense that consciousness would, or could, be wholly unaffected by the non-existence of the world. Such was not, however, his view. If the world did not exist, consciousness might—indeed would—still exist; but it would, necessarily, be *different* from what it actually is. This is, indeed, an implication of Husserl’s Idealism. The existence of the world, for Husserl, is not some absolute fact, neatly separable from the existence of consciousness, so that it could be simply subtracted, leaving consciousness just as it was. The only way in which Husserl ever spells out what the non-existence of the world means is, of course, phenomenologically: specifically, in terms of consciousness being a chaotic ‘tumult’ of experiences (e.g., Husserl, 1977, p. 91). If there actually is a world, then, necessarily, experience is *orderly*. The dissolution of the world, Husserl says on one occasion, would be equivalent to *the dissolution of the I* (K IV 3, 57). Elsewhere he characterises a descent into such a ‘tumult’ as the death of the self (A VI 30, 52).¹² So consciousness would be significantly different, in Husserl’s view, if there were no world. And one such difference could well be that it would fail to embody experiences that are of the same basic kind as genuinely perceptual experiences. There is even less reason to think that Husserl was committed to the view that the experiences in the world-less situation could be numerically identical to any experiences that are of a real world.

Another way to construe the *epoché* is as embodying an *epistemic* claim. We have, Husserl contends, apodictic certainty that we are conscious, and, moreover, that we are conscious in this and that determinate way.¹³ However, even given such certainty, it remains the case that we lack apodictic certainty that a real world exists. Even given our actual experience, it is a possibility, ‘for all we know’, that the world is unreal. For Husserl, the non-existence of the world is certainly *thinkable*. That the world exists, he says at one point, is not a matter of ‘insight’ (Husserl, 1977, p. 91).¹⁴ But is the non-existence of the world even thinkable for an externalist—at least for one who is absolutely assured, like Husserl, of the existence of his own conscious life? In fact it

¹¹ That Husserl believed even this is, in fact, not wholly beyond dispute, since there are several passages in his writings that suggest that there is some *necessity* to transcendental consciousness constituting a world. He says, for example, that he “cannot conceive of a plurality of monads except as spatialising, temporalising and realising itself within the world” (Husserl, 1973a, p. 166). The development of transcendental consciousness is possible, Husserl says, “only in so far as a world is constituted in it as objective, only in so far as an objective biological development takes place” (Husserl, 1973b, p. 271). At this ultimate metaphysical level Husserl questions the appropriateness of applying the contingent/necessary dichotomy—even with respect to the question of whether animals and humans ‘must’ exist (e.g., Husserl, 1973c, p. 669).

¹² This and the previous passage from Husserl’s manuscripts are both cited in Kern (1964, p. 294).

¹³ Matters are not quite as straightforward as this. Husserl questions the scope of apodictic knowledge even within the sphere of ‘purified’, transcendental consciousness, and calls for a ‘critique’ of such knowledge (e.g., Husserl, 1973a, p. 67; cf. Husserl, 1959, p. 170). I shall ignore this issue here, since Husserl’s worries on this score are quite independent of any commitment to externalism that he may have had.

¹⁴ This is not incompatible with Husserl’s explicating the non-existence of a world in terms of a tumult of experiences. His point is that we can have no insight into the existence of the world given any *finite* stretch of consciousness. A descent into chaos is always a thinkable possibility.

is. After all, the disjunctivist does not deny that hallucinations are experiences, or that it is ‘like something’ to hallucinate. So disjunctivism is compatible with believing that one has Cartesian certainty about the fact that one has experiences, and experiences of various sorts: e.g., just like seeing a white cat, just like hearing church bells ringing, and so on. All that the phenomenologist who is an externalist is denied is absolute certainty that his experiences are genuinely perceptual rather than hallucinatory. But that is hardly news to anyone; and it hardly constitutes a significant curb on the project of transcendental phenomenology.

Husserl, however, claims to have apodictic certainty not only concerning the fact that he has experiences of various kinds, but also concerning the *objects* of those experiences, at least as ‘purified’ phenomena—as we shall shortly see. But is it not the hallmark of disjunctivism that it denies that a hallucinating subject is aware of anything? And surely Husserl could not have believed that! Indeed he did not. In both genuinely perceptual and hallucinatory situations we are certain that we are aware of objects. The only possible doubt here concerns whether the objects are *real* or not. However, when disjunctivists claim that a hallucinating subject is not aware of an object, what they typically mean is that there is no *entity* of which such a subject is aware. And Husserl agrees with this. When we hallucinate, according to him, we are aware of *non-entities*—of objects that in reality are “nothing” (e.g., Husserl, 1977, p. 221). So, perhaps, when your typical disjunctivist denies and Husserl affirms that a hallucinating subject is aware of an object they are not straightforwardly contradicting one another. Still, it remains the case that Husserl’s insistence on this point is quite uncharacteristic of disjunctivism. It is, nevertheless, wholly compatible with this position’s central tenet, which is the negative claim that hallucinations and genuine perceptions do not involve the same fundamental kind of experience and hence are to be distinguished only extra-psychologically. For all that we have yet seen, Husserl can accept this claim. For he could accept that experiences can be assigned to kinds on the basis of the nature of the immediate objects of such experiences, and also claim that the immediate objects of awareness when we genuinely perceive and when we hallucinate are fundamentally different in kind—since in the one case the objects are real and in the other case they are unreal. This difference in turn is, as we shall see, traceable back to a necessary difference in the contents of the two kinds of experiences. This is, without doubt, an unusual form of disjunctivism; but a form of disjunctivism it is. And it is *this* sort of disjunctivist that, I shall argue, Husserl may well have been. Furthermore, the claim that a hallucinating subject is aware of an object, albeit an unreal one, in no way implies that perceptual experiences, when they are of real objects in world, are not individuated, in part, by reference to those very objects.

III

One key element in my argument for Husserl’s externalism is his account of intentionality. Intentionality, for Husserl, is a matter of experiences having objects, or of their being ‘directed’ or ‘related’ to objects: “One also calls conscious experiences *intentional*, whereby, however, the word ‘intentionality’ then means nothing other than this general fundamental property of consciousness, to be a consciousness *of something*” (Husserl, 1973a, p. 72). This is an essential feature of all

experiences.¹⁵ Even after the *epoché*, the ‘bracketing’ of the reality of the world, that every conscious experience is a consciousness of an object remains indubitable: “It should not be overlooked that the *epoché* with respect to all worldly being does not at all alter the fact that the manifold *cogitationes* that are related to something worldly carry this relation in themselves: that, for example, the perception of this table, now as before, is precisely a perception of it. And in general, every conscious experience is in itself a consciousness of this or that, however things may stand concerning the holding good of the reality of this object . . . [E]very conscious experience, as we can also say, means something or other” (Husserl, 1973a, p. 71). Moreover, not only does Husserl insist that any state of consciousness must have some object or other, he also claims that the *particular* object of which such a state is the consciousness is essential to that state. This is already indicated in the passage I have just quoted: the perception of “this table” remains, after the bracketing of the reality of the table, a perception “of it”. Husserl can even use the possessive adjective in this connection. In the margin of one of his copies of *Ideas I* Husserl adds to “an experience is consciousness of something” the phrase “and of *its* respective something” (Husserl, 1977, p. 489, original emphasis; cf. *ibid.*, 204). Moreover, what an experience is a consciousness of “lies in the essential being [*Wesen*] of the experience” (Husserl, 1977, p. 64). Elsewhere he explicitly says that every object of a conscious experience *belongs inseparably* to that experience (Husserl, 1968, pp. 172, 178–179). It is inseparable from the experience because it is inseparable from the “intentional synthesis of appearances” in which the experience consists (Husserl, 1968, p. 174).

Perhaps it will be suggested that what Husserl means when he says that the object of an experience is essential to it is that a particular *type* of object is thus essential, one specified just in terms of how it *appears* to consciousness. Your current visual experience would not, perhaps, be the very experience it is if it were not the experience of a page of print just like this one. But it is compatible with this that this very experience of yours could have been the experience of a numerically different (though qualitatively identical) page of print—from another copy of this journal, say. Indeed, could not this very experience of yours have been the mere hallucination of a page of print exactly like this one? If Husserl had accepted both of these suggestions, he would, of course, have subscribed to neither of the forms of externalism that I am attributing to him. But this is not at all what Husserl means. Indeed, shortly after one of the passages I have just cited, in which Husserl stresses the necessity of every experience having its ‘own’ object, he gives the following example: “A house-perception means [*meint*] a house, and more precisely *as this individual* [*individuell*] house” (Husserl, 1973a, p. 71, my emphasis). One can see why this must be so by considering the relation between the object of an experience and that experience’s *sense* (*Sinn*). Every intentional experience contains a sense (e.g., Husserl, 1977, pp. 181, 185). Moreover, the sense that any such experience contains is *essential* to it: it is “something that belongs necessarily to its essential being” (Husserl, 1977, p. 184). The relation between an experience’s sense and its object is, of course, a matter of controversy; but it is agreed on all hands that a conscious experience has an object *because and only because* of the sense that the experience embodies. Now, at a number of points in *Ideas I* Husserl states that his current employment of the term ‘sense’—by which, in this context, and indeed generally, he means *object-sense* (*gegenständlicher Sinn*), one component of what he now calls

¹⁵ Although there may be components of experiences that are not themselves intentional, any conscious experience, taken as a whole, will exhibit a directedness to an object.

the *noema*—is equivalent to the concept of ‘matter’ in the *Logical Investigations*.¹⁶ And it is beyond dispute that in the *Logical Investigations* the matter of a perceptual act determines more than a phenomenal appearance, a mere *type* of object: it determines a relatedness to an individual object.¹⁷ In a work that dates from the period between the *Logical Investigations* and *Ideas I* Husserl considers a case where a subject perceives two qualitatively identical but numerically distinct objects on two different occasions. Even though the subject may be convinced that he is dealing with one and the same object, the two perceptions have, according to Husserl, at most a likeness of sense (*Sinnesgleichheit*), not an identity of sense (*Sinnesidentität*) (Husserl, 1973d, p. 155). The clear implication is that an identity of sense between the two perceptions would give them not just similar, perhaps even exactly similar, objects, but *identical* objects. Moreover, Husserl makes essentially the same point after his adoption of the terminology of ‘noesis’ and ‘noema’: “Sameness of *Sinn* occurs only where the object *besides being identically the same*, is meant ‘in the same *Sinn*’” (my emphasis).¹⁸ And in *Ideas I* Husserl repeatedly characterises sameness of object-sense as involving *both* sameness of object and sameness of determining content (e.g., Husserl, 1977, pp. 195, 272, 273, 276). Indeed, when he initially introduces the notion of noema in this work, he does so by explicating sameness of sense with reference to an identical real object (Husserl, 1977, p. 189). The following passage, from a later work, is also noteworthy: “Today and tomorrow we can be conscious of absolutely the same thing. But that does not mean: to have the same individual piece in consciousness, as in a box. The identical sense is therefore an ideal identical moment in all conscious experiences that agree in sense” (Husserl, 1966, p. 321). All individual experiences that intend “absolutely the same thing” have identically the same component of sense. And the clear implication is that all other experiences, those that do not intend exactly the same object, lack this component of sense. The issue is put beyond dispute when he introduces the notion of the ‘determinable X in the core of the noema’—an individual ‘something’ to which consciousness is directed—as a necessary component of object-sense: “No ‘sense’ without the ‘something’”, a ‘something’ that belongs, Husserl says, to the core of the respective noema *inseparably* (Husserl, 1977, pp. 272, 270). This ‘determinable X’ manifestly has to do with numerical identity (Husserl, 1977, §131, *passim*). Such an X is not a purely formal, empty place-holder, which would be identical in every noema and every experience. For Husserl writes of different noemata sometimes having the *same* X and sometimes a *different* X. A continuous experience of an object, for example, involves the same X (Husserl, 1977, p. 287), “one and the same constantly given X” (Husserl, 1977, p. 298). Husserl can ask of the X that is apparently the same through a course of experience whether or not it is “really the same” (Husserl, 1977, pp. 280–281). We can distinguish classes of experience on the basis of whether or not they are experiences of the *same* determinable X (Husserl, 1977, pp. 297–298).

¹⁶ See, for example, Husserl (1977, pp. 268, 274, and the marginal note added to the heading of §130, p. 513). Indeed, already in the *Logical Investigations* Husserl had characterised matter as ‘sense’—specifically ‘interpretation-sense’ (*Auffassungssinn*) (Husserl, 1984, V. §20).

¹⁷ Note that I am not arguing that because an experience’s sense is essential to that experience, and because sense determines object, such an object is essential to that experience. Such a conclusion does not follow from these two premises—since ‘determine’ may have only the weak sense of fixing reference *in the actual world*. I appeal to Husserl’s discussion of the relation between sense and object only to show the *kind* of object that Husserl has in mind as being determined (possibly weakly) by sense: namely, an *individual* object. It is such an object that Husserl has in mind when he states *explicitly* that an experience’s object is essential to it.

¹⁸ Quoted from an unpublished manuscript of Husserl’s in Føllesdal (1969, p. 683).

And in a ‘many-membered positing’ each member has ‘its’ X, and there is an overall X corresponding to the unified complex (Husserl, 1977, p. 273). So an experience’s object is inseparable from any experience that is intentionally directed to it because it is inseparable from that experience’s ‘determinable X’, which is inseparable from that experience’s sense, which is inseparable from that experience.

A concern with the identity of an object of experience is, indeed, at the very heart of Husserl’s phenomenological enterprise. He characteristically indicates the sort of discoveries that the phenomenological reduction can deliver by pointing to the changing multiplicities of perceptual appearances that constitute appearances of *one and the same object*. Here is just one example of many: “If, for example, I take the perceiving of this die as the subject of description, then I see in pure reflection that *this* die is continuously given as an objective unity in a multi-form, changing multiplicity of ways of appearing that belong determinately to it. These are not, in their flow, an unconnected succession of experiences. They flow, rather, in the unity of a synthesis, in accordance with which we are conscious of one and the same thing as appearing in it” (Husserl, 1973a, pp. 77–78; cf. Husserl, 1968, p. 238 and §28). In perceptual experience an object is given as “an ideally identical pole” in contrast to the changing “contents” of experience (Husserl, 1968, p. 154). The appearing object is intended as the “identical substrate” of determinations that subsequent experience of the object will fix (Husserl, 1968, p. 177). To speak of an object as such a ‘pole’ of identity, is, Husserl writes, just to say that it can enter into a synthesis with other experiences that intend identically the same thing (e.g., Husserl, 1966, p. 394). Moreover, this sense of identity, which, for Husserl, is essential to the sense of dealing with an object at all, concerns not only the apparent unity of an object during a continuous course of perceiving the same thing, but also the unity of an object as the subject of *re-identifications* across different experiences. Where such re-identification is not in principle possible, Husserl repeatedly says, talk of an ‘object’ is inappropriate (e.g., Husserl, 1966, pp. 326–327; Husserl, 1974, pp. 140–141, 251).

We have already seen that Husserl regards every experience as necessarily embodying a sense. It is, in fact, such a sense that is responsible for this appreciation of identity that is essential to any experience. For an experience to have a sense is, Husserl says, for the experience itself, noetically considered, to “to prefigure . . . a series of possible identifications” (Husserl, 1966, p. 3231). It is precisely the possibility of re-identifying something as identically the same across different acts “that determines the concept of object-sense” (Husserl, 1966, p. 321). Indeed, he can simply characterise sense in terms of identity: “the identical, which we call sense” (Husserl, 1966, p. 322). Hence, Husserl can characterise the element of ‘sense-bestowal’ (*Sinngebung*) in an experience as that experience’s “*Identitätsgehalt*” (Husserl, 1966, p. 321).

IV

So, when Husserl writes about an experience’s object being inseparable from that experience, he is definitely not talking about a mere *kind* of object, but an individual, identifiable and re-identifiable object. Nevertheless, an informed reader may object, all of the above is quite irrelevant to the claim that Husserl may have been an externalist. For Husserl would be an externalist, in the relevant sense, only if the object that is essential to a perceptual experience can be a *real object in the world*. However, nothing I have said so far indicates that Husserl believed any such thing. In the several

passages I have cited, where Husserl claims that a perceptual experience's object is essential to it, inseparable from its essential being, Husserl is always talking about what he terms the perceived object 'as perceived', or 'as such', something that, he insists, is quite distinct from any real object in the world: "The *tree simpliciter*, the thing in nature, could not be more different from the perceived tree *as such* that, as perceptual sense, inseparably belongs to the perception. The tree *simpliciter* can burn down, can be reduced to its chemical elements, etc. But the sense—the sense of *this* perception, something that necessarily belongs to its essential being—can not burn down" (Husserl, 1977, p. 184). A 'perceived as such' *just is* a perceptual sense (Husserl, 1977, p. 182). Whenever Husserl says that an object is inseparable from an experience it is *always* the object 'as such' that he means: the experience's '*cogitatum qua cogitatum*', its object-sense—which in the case of perception is *perceptual sense*.¹⁹ The object that is inseparable from an experience is, in other words, an *intentional object*; and an intentional object is an object-sense (Husserl, 1977, p. 185). As a matter of fact, the term 'intentional object' has *two* principal meanings for Husserl. It can stand for the object-sense, as we have just seen; but it can also stand for the 'determinable X' at the heart of such a sense (Husserl, 1977, p. 272). It is the latter that I have been principally concerned with. But this, too, being a component of sense (Husserl, 1977, p. 272), can hardly be identified with a real physical object either. It can no more burn down than the perceptual sense of which it is a component. Indeed, generally, within the phenomenological reduction, 'object' just is a sense. Within the reduction, Husserl explicitly says, "we take the object merely as an intended sense" (Husserl, 1966, p. 321).

Moreover, Husserl writes things about the distinction between objects *qua* sense and real objects that may seem clearly to invalidate any idea that he was an externalist. For he writes that "the circumstance that defines this sense for us—namely, the fact that the non-existence . . . of the object *simpliciter* that is represented or thought of cannot rob the representation in question (and hence the relevant experience overall) of its represented as such—could not remain hidden" (Husserl, 1977, p. 185). And in a later passage, where Husserl is considering the perception of a tree, he writes that "to the essential being of the perceptual experience in itself there belongs the 'perceived tree as such' . . . , which is not touched by excluding the reality of the tree itself" (Husserl, 1977, p. 202). Such passages are not conclusive, however. Neither of these passages explicitly says that the sense involved in a perception of a real object is indifferent to the reality or otherwise of that perception's object. Both passages can be read as saying, simply, that every perceptual state has a sense whether or not it is a perception of a real object. Whether *the same sense* could be present in these two different circumstances is an issue that is not explicitly addressed. Furthermore, I suggest, there are two central elements in Husserl's thought that commit him to a denial of such a position. The first, not surprisingly, is Husserl's account of the *reality* of an object of experience. We shall be exploring this in the following section. The other is something to which I have already drawn attention as the key to this whole issue: namely, Husserl's account of *implicit intentionality*—to which we now turn.

"Intentional analysis," writes Husserl, "is guided by the basic recognition that every *cogito* is a consciousness, indeed in the widest sense a meaning [*Meinung*], of its meant; but that this meaning is in every moment more (with more meant) than what is present

¹⁹ The perceived object 'as perceived' or 'as such' is the object-sense together with the 'character' of perceivedness (Husserl, 1977, p. 274).

in any given moment as what is *explicitly* meant . . . This meaning-beyond-itself that lies in every consciousness must be regarded as an essential moment of it” (Husserl, 1973a, p. 84). Phenomenology is not, as certain analytical philosophers seem to think, just a matter of cataloguing how things seem to you. Phenomenological research is *difficult* because it is, in large part, a matter of “uncovering . . . implicit intentionality”, of “uncovering pre-delineated horizons” (Husserl, 1973a, p. 98). It is this above all, Husserl stresses, that is distinctive of the ‘analysis’ of experience that phenomenology involves: *intentional analysis* (Husserl, 1973a, p. 83). It is implicit intentionality that constitutes a “horizon of sense” for any experience: a horizon that Husserl regards as a “basic feature [*Grundzug*] of intentionality” (Husserl, 1973a, p. 82). All intentionality has a “horizon-structure” (Husserl, 1973a, p. 86). An external object “is from the start and continually meant with a transcendent sense, with an open horizon of sense” (Husserl, 1968, p. 183). Moreover, such a horizon of sense lies in the very being of experiences as such: “Every experience has . . . a *horizon*—an intentional horizon of reference to potentialities of consciousness that belong to it [*sc.* the experience] itself” (Husserl, 1973a, p. 82).

Husserl commonly distinguishes between an object’s *inner* and *outer* horizon. It is the former that will concern us here. When we see a physical object, only certain aspects of it are, as Husserl puts it, ‘actually’ perceived, or are ‘exhibited’ in our experience: namely, the object’s facing side and its features. When I see an object at a certain time, I do not, indeed I cannot, see the rear side of that object at that time. It is the whole object that I see: but what I see *of* the object is just its facing side. So there is always more of the object to be ‘actually’ seen.²⁰ As Husserl says: “Here there is something of which we are conscious as it itself; but it is more than what we are actually conscious of; there is yet more of the same thing to experience” (Husserl, 1974, p. 206). More, note, *of the same object* to be perceived. This is not an incursion into pure phenomenology of the ‘objective’ knowledge that physical objects have unperceived sides. It is, rather, itself a phenomenological datum. Physical objects *appear* like that—i.e., *as* having more to them than is revealed in one glance—and we take them to be like that. So taking them is not, according to Husserl, a matter of some ‘belief’ or ‘judgement’ over and above the perceptual experience itself, but an essential ingredient in any such experience. It is part of the experience’s intentional content. Husserl says of “the current more” of an object that is currently being perceived—i.e., what *could* be perceived of the object over and above what is now being perceived of it—that it “lies intentionally included in the consciousness itself, as this actual and potential intentionality, whose structure I can at any time consult” (Husserl, 1974, pp. 240–241). Perceptual experience contains an implicit reference to such unseen sides of an object in the form of ‘empty’, ‘unfilled’ intentions that are directed to such sides. If this were not so, the object in question would not, as it does, *appear as* having more to it than is actually seen.

A perception’s (inner) horizon includes not only possible experiences of aspects of the object we have not yet perceived, and possible past and future experiences of the same object, but also possible experiences in which the present view of the object might have been different through having a different perspective on the side

²⁰ Seeing is Husserl’s favoured example of perceiving. But the point also holds for perceiving a thing through touch. I can only ‘actually’ feel a part of an object’s surface through touch at any one time. As for the other senses, see the following footnote.

of the object now in view (Husserl, 1973a, p. 82).²¹ Indeed, in virtue of this horizon-structure a given perception is related to “all the possible perceptions that could be synthetically united to the given perception in the continuous consciousness of one and the same object” (Husserl, 1968, p. 185). Equally importantly, for our purposes, a perception’s (inner) horizon includes *only* perceptions that are perceptions of the very same object. It is because of this that Husserl can write, in relation to any given perception, of a *system* of perceptions. A perception’s horizon of sense is a “total intention” that relates to a “system” of determinations of “just this object” (Husserl, 1968, p. 182). He is making essentially the same point in the following passage from earlier in his career: “If we had all the singular perceptual essences [*Essenzen*] before our eyes and we compared them . . . with the given perception *A*, . . . then these essences would fall into two classes. Each perceptual essence in the one class founds with *A*, with the essential being of *A*, a consciousness of identity, and each perceptual essence in the other class a consciousness of non-identity. If, for example, we are dealing with the perception of a house, the first group would contain the ideal sum total of ‘possible perceptions’ of the same house” (Husserl, 1973d, p. 31). So any given experience, in virtue of its intentional content, prescribes what other experiences *can* unite synthetically with that experience to give a consciousness of *the very same object*. Hence, Husserl can say that each physical thing is represented (*vertreten*) by “all the possible ‘subjective modes of appearing’ in which it can be noematically constituted as identical” (Husserl, 1977, p. 279).

It is important to stress that, for Husserl, such a system of actual and possible experiences is “intentionally included in the consciousness itself” (Husserl, 1974, p. 240). Only because of this can it be the case that all the perceptions that pertain to a single physical object “are essentially . . . as it were *pre-delineated* in, are as it were extractable from . . . the experiences themselves” (Husserl, 1977, p. 176). Every possible determination of the same object is but an “explication” of the original intention (Husserl, 1968, p. 184), an explication of the “implicit sense” (Husserl, 1973a, p. 85). An exploration of an object’s horizon is “an uncovering of the intentionality implicit in the experience itself” (Husserl, 1973a, p. 98). What we uncover is “the object-sense meant implicitly in the actual *cogito*” (Husserl, 1973a, p. 82). Each such realisation is an ‘instalment’ of the total object-sense (Husserl, 1968, p. 185).²² Husserl is quite clear that he is therefore committed to the view that a perception of an object harbours infinities within it (e.g., Husserl, 1977, p. 313). He does not, however, regard this as problematic: “A meaning [*Meinen*] can contain an infinity of meanings, and, equally, a sense infinites of sense . . . There are infinities of sense that the meaning in question encompasses in its actuality as an experience” (Husserl, 1968, p. 183). An experience essentially contains a reference to an infinity of other perceptions not just in the sense that, necessarily, every experience contains some such reference or other, but in the stronger sense that every experience essentially has a reference to a particular infinite

²¹ This means that there are horizons also for the senses other than sight and touch. First, there are possible past and future perceptions of sounds, tastes and smells. And second, there are, in a broad sense, different ‘perspectives’ that we can take on such phenomena—if only it be a matter of how a thing sounds or smells *from here* rather than *from there*. (Taste, may be an exception to this: though even here we can, if we are sufficiently interested, move an object around in our mouths so as to perceive its taste more fully.)

²² Indeed, Husserl can equate a perceptual ‘appearance’, in one sense of this term, with an “imperfectly fulfilled perceptual sense” (Husserl, 1977, p. 287). So, in this sense, even an appearance is object-involving.

totality: namely, that containing all and only those perceptions that intend identically the same object.

It might be objected, however, that we are here but going round in a small, un-explanatory circle. A perception has a determinable X in virtue of which it relates to one and only one individual object. It so relates to a particular object in virtue of being a member of an infinite ‘system’ of perceptions that includes all and only perceptions that can be united with the first perception in a synthesis of identity. But why can these and only these latter perceptions be so synthetically united? Husserl’s only answer may seem to be: because of the determinable X that they contain. But that really just means that they can be united in a synthesis of identity. Husserl may, then, appear to be saying nothing more than that a perception can be synthetically united only with those perceptions with which it can be synthetically united. Indeed, we may now seem to be losing any real grip on what it is for a given experience to intend one individual object rather than another. For we have seen that, according to Husserl, which individual object a perception intends is determined by which other perceptions can be synthetically united with it in a consciousness of the identity of the object. But these other perceptions are relevant only because they themselves intend the same object. The supposed explication of identity seems to presuppose the very notion. So, to take a concrete example, suppose I see a black cat in my garden on Monday and a black cat in my garden on Tuesday. Are these perceptions synthesisable? According to Husserl they are if and only if they are perceptions of the same individual cat. But what *phenomenological* sense are we to give to such a claim? To put the question another way, what makes Tuesday’s perception of a cat a member of the same ‘system’ of perceptions that Monday’s perception belongs to? To say that the two perceptions must be perceptions of numerically the same object is no doubt true, but in need of phenomenological elucidation. And to say that the two perceptions are suitably synthesisable may seem either like brute assertion or a begging of the question. If it they are so synthesisable, why are they so? No doubt because of their ‘noematic content’; but if that just means ‘in virtue of having the same determinable X’, we are again going round in a circle.

Husserl escapes from such vacuous circularity because he recognises an *experience of identity*. Here, as elsewhere, he brings everything back to ‘intuition’. If there is sense to our talk of a possible synthesis of two perceptions that are of an identical object, such a synthesis must itself be experienceable. And Husserl finds this experienceability in what he calls *continuous synthesis*. As I walk round an object while keeping my eye on it, formerly hidden aspects come into view. Their sensory presence ‘fills’ or ‘covers’ the earlier empty intentions that were, as implicit elements in the perception’s intentionality, emptily directed to those parts. The present fulfilled phase of perception is synthesised with the earlier, partially empty phases in a continuing, unbroken sense of the persisting identity of the object. In such a continuous perception there is a “continuous unity of sense” (Husserl, 1973d, p. 102).²³ Here the identity of the object through the changing but continuous perception is “absolutely given” and seen with “self-evidence” (*Evidenz*) (Husserl, 1973d, p. 28). Indeed, *only* in such continuous perception is the identity of the object seen with self-evidence. The identity of an object across discrete, separate perceptions of the same object is not, Husserl says, demonstrated by the perceptions taken singly. Rather, he writes, “we should speak of an identity being self-evidently given only when the continuous transition from

²³ Not necessarily a persisting *unchanged* sense, of course.

one perception to another is guaranteed in the unity of experience [*Erfahrung*]. The unity of the object demonstrates itself only in the continuously linking synthesis of the multiple perceptions” (Husserl, 1973d, p. 155).

Now, if an object continues to exist, then any perception of it, fleeting though it may actually be, *could* in principle be continued: “Here the potentiality is the certainty in the sphere of my consciousness itself . . . of the ‘I can’ or the ‘I could’—the certainty, that is to say, of the ‘I could’ bring into play synthetically connected sequences of consciousness, the unitary effect of which would be that I should be continuously conscious of the same object” (Husserl, 1974, p. 241; cf. Husserl, 1977, p. 287). And again: “To every consciousness, as consciousness of something, there belongs the essential property that not only can it pass over into ever new consciousnesses that are of the same object, but that it can do this, indeed only do this, according to that horizon-intentionality” (Husserl, 1973a, p. 83). Moreover, the self-evident identity of the object extends to *all* such possible continued perceptions of it (Husserl, 1973d, p. 189). The possibility of such continued perceptions, wherein the identity of the perceived object is self-evident, is the ultimate phenomenological presupposition for the identities that hold between the objects of discrete perceptions. “This continuous synthesis,” Husserl writes, “must be the basis for the logical synthesis, that of identification, producing the self-evident givenness of the identity of the objects that appear in separate perceptions” (Husserl, 1973d, p. 155). So, when I espy that cat on Tuesday, and perhaps wonder if it is the same cat that I saw on Monday, the fact that alone would constitute the truth of such an identity is a possible continued perception of the cat from Monday that finally gives rise to a perception of *this* cat perceived on Tuesday. Monday’s and Tuesday’s cats are the same only if, in uncovering the horizon of Monday’s perception, we find a (possible) perception of this cat seen on Tuesday.

Husserl also applies this perspective to the case of memory: “Just as perception of a temporal object carries with it its temporal horizon, so too recollection repeats the consciousness of this horizon. Two recollections can be memories of like temporal objects—for example, of two tones that are alike. But they are recollections of the same temporal object when not merely the duration-content is the same, but the temporal horizon is the same: when, therefore, the two recollections fully and completely repeat one another with respect to intentional content” (Husserl, 1969, p. 108). An experience of mine has its identity in virtue of its temporal position in my stream of consciousness. To recall a past experience of mine is implicitly to recall its temporal position, and, hence, implicitly its relation to my living present. As Husserl says, “The whole is reproduced: not only the former conscious present with its flow, but ‘*implicite*’ the whole stream of consciousness up to the living present” (Husserl, 1969, p. 54). Husserl insisted that it is in principle possible to render *intuitive* an experience’s temporal location in my stream of consciousness, and, thereby, the experience in its individuality, by effecting a series of recollections that lead back from my present experience to any past experience of mine (e.g., Husserl, 1948, §42; Husserl, 1977, pp. 293–294).

When Husserl refers to the ‘system’ of possible perceptions that relate to a single object, he often stresses that this system contains perceptual continuities that involve a *continuous synthesis*. We have already encountered one such passage, though now we can emphasise the point: an object’s perceptual system includes “all the possible perceptions that could be synthetically united to the given perception *in the continuous consciousness of one and the same object*” (Husserl, 1968, p. 185, my emphasis). And again: “This meaning-beyond-itself that lies in every consciousness must be regarded

as an essential moment of it. But that it is and must be a meaning more of the same thing is first demonstrated by the self-evidence of a possible clarification, and ultimately of an intuitive disclosure *in the form of an actual and possible continuing perceiving*” (Husserl, 1973a, p. 84, my emphasis). This repeated reference to possible *continuities* of perception within the total system of actual and possible perceptions that concern a single object is not fortuitous, since Husserl makes it clear that in his philosophy, as far as the clarification of intentional synthesis is concerned, “that of the continuous syntheses (such as, for example, those contained in a flowing, unitary perception) is privileged as the basis for the high-level clarification of discrete syntheses” (Husserl, 1976, §49).

V

The final element in my case for Husserl’s externalism is his account of *reality* (*Wirklichkeit*), of what it is for an object to be real or ‘existent’ (*seiend*). “An existent object,” writes Husserl, “is the correlate for connections of consciousness of a wholly determined essential nature [*Wesensgehalt*], just as, conversely, the being of the connections so composed is equivalent to an existent object” (Husserl, 1977, p. 177). And after referring to the synthesis within perception that brings an identical object to givenness, Husserl writes that “it must, if the identical perceptual object truly exists in reality, allow of being identified in further actual and possible experience” (Husserl, 1968, p. 174). Now, such claims may seem not to take us beyond what Husserl has said about any object whatever, whether it be real or not. Any object whatever, as we have seen, will have a horizon of sense pointing to possible further identifications of it as the same. In fact, at one point Husserl says that there has been an ambiguity in his claim that an object necessarily relates to a system of possible experiences that intend the same object. The ambiguity arises precisely because of the issue whether the object in question is real or not (Husserl, 1977, p. 281). Here is how he follows up this indication: “For us ‘object’ is everywhere a term for essential connections of consciousness. It appears first as the noematic X . . . It then appears as the term ‘real object’, and is then a term for certain eidetically considered *rational* connections, in which the unitary X as sense in them *receives its rational positing*” (Husserl, 1977, p. 302, my emphasis). It is the same ambiguity that Husserl is addressing elsewhere when he writes that we can make a ‘structural separation’ within the infinite multiplicities of possible and actual experiences that relate to one and the same object. “Really existing object,” he says, indicates a “particular system” within this multiplicity. This particular system includes all and only those experiences that intend the same object *with self-evidence* (*Evidenz*), and in such a way that they can be synthetically united in an infinite “total self-evidence” (*Totalevidenz*). This total, synthetically unified system of experiences would present the object in question with respect to “everything that it is” (Husserl, 1973a, pp. 97–98). Such a ‘particular system’ is not only ‘total’, but, since it relates to an object that is *real*, also totally *harmonious*: it is a continuum that is “infinite on all sides, consisting, in all of its phases, of appearances of the same determinable X that are so arranged as to their connections and so determined as to their essential nature that the continuous progression through every arbitrary *line* of it results in a harmonious connection of experiences . . . in which one and the same continuously given X is more ‘closely’, and never ‘otherwise’, determined in a continuous, harmonious way” (Husserl, 1977, pp. 297–298; cf. *ibid.*, 317). This is what

Husserl calls the “consciousness-equivalent” of the reality of an object (Husserl, 1977, p. 319). Conversely, ‘real object’ is the ‘correlate’ of such a system of harmoniously connected experiences (Husserl, 1977, p. 303).

On one occasion Husserl employs the example of the Feldberg to illustrate his understanding of the sense that attaches to the notion of a real physical object. The Feldberg would still exist, he says, “even though no perception from its system of perceptions actualises it”, so long as it is “accessible” from perceptions of other things. This is because, whenever we have a real physical object, “an infinity of actual or possible perceptions is ready, any chosen one of which would equally bring it to givenness. Indeed, if, outside this circle of its perceptions, subjective conditions were fulfilled that could guarantee the production of such perceptions, the transcendent object as idea would still exist as a reality and could count as existent, even though no perception were actualised” (Husserl, 1968, p. 186). What is significant here for our purposes is the claim that an individual physical object, such as the Feldberg, has ‘its’ system of perceptions that in some sense is ‘ready’. What is required for membership of this system is, of course, just that all the perceptions in the system include the *same determinable X* in their content: in other words, that each be synthesisable with any of the others in a unity of identification; and also, given that the Feldberg is a real physical object, that such a system be harmonious *in infinitum*.

Husserl characterises the totally harmonious system of actual and possible perceptions that is the ‘consciousness equivalent’ of a real physical object as an “‘idea’ (in the Kantian sense)” (Husserl, 1977, p. 297). Now, this ‘idea’, although it is characterised by Husserl as a ‘system’, is not precisely the sort of system we considered earlier: it is not the system of *all* possible perceptions of one and the same object, albeit with the restriction that the object in question is real. For the latter sort of system will, even when the object in question is real, contain illusory perceptions, since it is certainly *possible* that a real object should be misperceived. However, the crucial point is that any such illusory perception will, according to Husserl, be corrected within the total system of all perceptions that relate to that object. Such a perception will be ultimately disconfirmed in the context of the system as a whole. As Husserl says, “Every illusion bears witness to a deeper truth, and every conflict is, in its place, just what is demanded by wider contexts for the maintenance of total harmony” (Husserl, 1977, p. 91). Any illusion, as he says in one of his unpublished manuscripts, since it is an illusory experience *of a real object*, “is harmoniously included again in a more general regulation of experience, and is included as a possible experiential occurrence belonging harmoniously to . . . the fully developed experience” (A VII 17, 34b). Let us term ‘ultimately harmonious’ any totality of actual and possible experiences relating to a single object that, although it may (unlike the Kantian ‘idea’) contain illusory perceptions, and hence conflict, is harmonious *as a whole*: i.e., is such that any illusion it contains is shown up as an illusion by reference to the totality of experiences in the system. In Husserl’s view it is a *necessary truth* that the object of the perceptions in such an ultimately harmonious system of perception is real. So a certain system of perceptions is *essentially*, when it is, a system pertaining to a *real* object.

When the object of a perceptual experience is wholly unreal, as in the case of hallucination, there is, necessarily, *no* ultimately harmonious total system of experiences pertaining to just that object. For if the object of some experience is unreal, there is some possible experience of that object in which its unreality is exposed. There is a possible perception of the object that, as Husserl memorably says, “explodes” (Husserl, 1977, p. 287). Hence, if certain appearances are appearances of what is

wholly unreal, then, Husserl tells us, “they refer to a series of appearances and to connections of appearances that do not fit harmoniously into the whole actual nexus of appearances. Nor, moreover, do they make possible a single harmonious nexus of physical things” (Husserl, 1973d, p. 287). Now, whether a total system of perceptions is in harmony or not is, of course, something that is internal and essential to such a system. The harmony in question is not a matter of the system harmonising with something outside it, but of the harmoniousness of the system itself.²⁴ Therefore, a perception of a real object and a perhaps perfectly matching hallucination *necessarily belong to two different total systems of perceptions*: for, necessarily, one belongs to a system that is ultimately harmonious, and one belongs to a system that is not, and harmoniousness or lack of it is a feature that is internal to such systems.

There is but one final step to make in our argument, and this is but a matter of making explicit something that was already suggested by the discussion in the previous section of this paper. It is to note that any given perception is *essentially* a member of the total system of actual and possible perceptions of which it is a member. That a given perception can be synthetically unified with another perception—and therefore be a member of the same system as the other perception—is “grounded in the essential being of the senses” of the perceptions in question (Husserl, 1977, p. 272; cf. Husserl, 1974, p. 28). Such possibilities of synthesis are of the essence of perceptions that are thus synthesisable, because they are determined by the noematic content of the respective perceptions: “The unity of a physical thing stands over against an infinite ideal multiplicity of noetic experiences of a wholly determined essential composition . . . , all of them united by being consciousness of ‘the same’” (Husserl, 1977, p. 279). Note that what binds these experiences together as experiences of the same thing is a matter of “determined essential content”. Moreover, what Husserl means by saying that a certain physical thing “stands over against” such a unified multiplicity of experiences is that it is the *necessary correlate* of such experience. Such determination is made even clearer a little further on in the same work: “We assign to an object multiplicities of . . . experiences of a certain noematic content in such a way that through it [*sc.* the noematic content] syntheses of identification become a priori possible, in virtue of which the object can and must be present as the same. The X in the different acts . . . is necessarily intended as the same” (Husserl, 1977, p. 280). Note the “necessarily” here. That two acts can enter into a synthesis of identification *entails* that they intend the same object. And this is, once again, said to be a function of the noematic content—i.e., the sense—of the experiences in question. In particular, it is a function of the ‘determinable X in the core of the noema’.²⁵ But, as we have seen, an experience possesses its noematic content *essentially*. Therefore, whatever follows necessarily from the noematic content of perceptions holds of those perceptions necessarily. But what we have just seen to follow necessarily from the noematic content of two arbitrary perceptions is their synthesisability (or not, as the case may be). Therefore, if two (or more) perceptions are synthesisable, they are *essentially* so. But such synthesisability is the necessary and sufficient condition for perceptions forming a system of perceptions that have an identical object as correlate. Therefore, a perception’s membership of its system is something that is essential to it.

²⁴ Recall that the systems in question are total: they include *all possible* perceptions relating to a certain object.

²⁵ Husserl, of course, also accepts the converse of these implications. Necessarily, two experiences intend the same object *only if* they are synthesisable in a synthesis of identification, something that is itself possible *only if* they share the same ‘determinable X’.

Now, as we have seen, any given total system of perceptions that has a *real* object as correlate *essentially* has a real object as correlate; and any system of perceptions that has an unreal, merely hallucinatory object as correlate *essentially* has an unreal object as correlate. Moreover, it is a necessary truth that the object of any individual perception that is a member of a given total system of perceptions is real if and only if the object that is the correlate of the entire system is real. And it of course follows from this, given that membership of a particular total system is essential to any given perceptual experience, that any perception that is of a real physical object—i.e., is non-hallucinatory—is essentially a perception of that real object. Husserl is therefore committed to the second of the two theses that I have attributed to him: that when an experience is the perception of a real object, that object is essential to that experience in virtue of the experience's content. Husserl also emerges as a disjunctivist, or at least as someone whose views ultimately commit him to this position. This is because perceptions and hallucinations are treated by him as essentially and intrinsically different *kinds* of experiences, since, necessarily, every genuinely perceptual experience, in so far as it is genuinely perceptual, is essentially a member of some system of experiences that necessarily has a real object as correlate; and, necessarily, every hallucinatory experience, in so far as it is hallucinatory, is essentially a member of some system of experiences that necessarily has an unreal object as correlate; and this difference in essential kind is grounded in an inherent, essential feature of the experiences themselves—specifically, their noematic content.²⁶ Husserl therefore holds, or is at least committed to, both the forms of externalism with which this paper has been concerned.

VI

I want, in conclusion, to consider an objection to the argument I have just developed. The objection does not take the form of contesting any of the steps of the argument itself, but rather of pointing to a certain consequence of the claim that Husserl held the externalist position I am attributing to him. The suggestion is that the consequence is so clearly unacceptable that Husserl could not have been committed to it.

Recall that, even if Husserl was an externalist, he was certainly an idealist. I have suggested that we can make sense of this combination of views by seeing that, for Husserl, real objects in the world are 'external' to any individual consciousness because they are essentially constituted by *intersubjective* consciousness. Another transcendental consciousness is in a suitable sense external to my own, since it does not supervene on my own. Since real, 'objective' physical objects are essentially constituted by reference to such 'external' monadic consciousness, they too emerge as external to any individual consciousness in a suitably robust sense.

The problem now is, however, that if, as I have suggested, non-hallucinatory perceptual experience essentially depends on its intending a real physical object, it will essentially depend upon whatever the reality of such an object essentially depends upon. But the reality of a physical object essentially depends upon facts concerning intersubjective monadic consciousness. This means that the experiences I have

²⁶ Someone might object that an object's sense is not a 'really inherent' (*reell*) feature of experiences. This objection would be irrelevant; but in any case we can trace the fundamental ground of difference back to the *noetic* features of experience (which are certainly really inherent in experience), since an experience's noema is determined by its noesis.

at any moment, and the kind of experience I am having—hallucinatory or non-hallucinatory—depend upon (actual and possible) facts concerning the experiences of other subjects. But, surely, my experiences do not essentially depend upon what others are experiencing and will experience. In particular, surely the very *identity* of my experience cannot so depend. This, however, would be the implausible result if Husserl did indeed hold the position that I have ascribed to him.²⁷

There is not space here to go fully into the metaphysical aspects of Husserl's philosophy that this question involves. So let me simply say that it is, in fact, far from clear that Husserl would have rejected the implication that has just been exposed. For Husserl certainly was willing to characterise transcendental subjects as being *determined from outside*. This is because they *affect* one another (Husserl, 1974, pp. 243–244). He can even write of causality in this connection (e.g., Husserl, 1973b, pp. 266–268). There is, as he says elsewhere, a “law-governedness that controls the course of [a monad's] experiences” (B II 2, 14b). And this “regulation of sensibility is . . . an intersubjective one” (Husserl, 1952, p. 336). If, however, there is such a law-like ‘regulation’, this will sustain counterfactual truths about the occurrence of experiences: truths that can, at this level of transcendental analysis, only relate experiences to other experiences.

I should also say that I have just addressed the foregoing problem at the level of transcendental consciousness. But such a level is, of course, absent from standard versions of externalism, with which alone we are properly concerned here. Externalism is standardly presented as a thesis that operates at the level of what Husserl himself would regard as *psychology*: something that concerns not transcendental consciousness, but the ‘soul’, conceived of as a *worldly* being—one that is itself intersubjectively constituted. And it is beyond dispute that Husserl thinks that ‘psychological’ states are, at least in part, caused by our interaction with objects in the physical world. In particular, perceptual sensations are so caused (e.g., Husserl, 1952, p. 337). So the causal problem simply does not arise for Husserl at the level at which externalism is typically conceived. It is certainly true that if Husserl was an externalist, externalism does need to be integrated into his philosophy as a whole—including the transcendental dimension. But I have briefly indicated how a response to the causal problem at this ultimate level may be addressed.

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²⁷ The view in question also implies that what experiences I am having at any time essentially depend on what other experiences are possible for me. And this might be thought to be equally implausible.

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